

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

ACTOR - The “writer” and performer of the show

DOWNY FRANCISCO - a superpowered musician

CORIONE - a stage magician

BRAD BAUGHER - a stand-up comic

RILEY - a haunted individual attempting a self-exorcism

SETH COLFAX - a suicidal man

WHISPER - A disembodied voice

VOICE - a presenter at a funeral

## I. SILENCE, SUPERMAN, AND STILL

At rise: a long rehearsal block lays horizontally. Beside the coffin, a photo of one Eleanor Quaso. Beneath the photo, her name. Beneath her name, her public alias: Captain Impulse, an electricity-based superhero thought to be the person who might usher in peace. Instead, she's dead, an usher of nothing.

This is her funeral. A public funeral. The sort given to politicians. Or, more important, celebrity.

Music sounds, somber. Mr. DOWNY FRANCISCO, dressed formal, walks to the side of the coffin. He, too, has superpowers. A human speaker. He can project whatever sounds he hears in his mind.

Calling him on, a disembodied voice.

VOICE

(Off)

Our next speaker is musician Downy Francisco. He and Captain Impulse were childhood friends.

DOWNY

Thank you.

In the second grade, Miss Buttleswick, my language arts and homeroom teacher, high on what we'd later learn was her third Diazepam and second glue sniff of the day, told my class she was excited to tell us she was pregnant. We were learning about verb tenses. None of us understood what all the past perfect, simple past, past participle, what any of that meant. Foggy minds of kids. Forgot all about that stuff. We started giddy shouting stupid names like "Pillow" and "McRadical" and "Robert." Miss Buttleswick held up her hand until we quieted up, and she said, "But I'm not having a baby because, over the weekend, my baby died." This was her second of six miscarriages.

## DOWNY

Ever dangled love in front of a suicidal man only to push him off the overpass when he starts to reach out for it? He gasps, you know. I'd imagine in the seconds before he splatters on the road, his head would be ever so noisy and so terribly silent.

That lingering gasp is how I think my second grade class settled back into our desks that morning as we considered death for the first time.

I always thought dying was something old people did. But it grabs the young, too. Maybe that's why, but it didn't shock me when Eleanor died.

Heh. Shock.

It's funny because, you know... Captain Impulse and her electricity, zapping people. Do you remember back when she just went by Impulse? The marketing goons somewhere in DC convinced her to tag on the "Captain." I warned her it was tacky. She said it was cool. And now she's dead.

Ellie's sister, Fancy, she's how I met Ellie. We dated way back in middle school. Fancy says she thinks I made her gay. You're welcome, Beth. You know, I say the same about her. A couple of closet-cases dating each other. The classic story. Boy meets girl. Girl turns out to be a lesbian. That's fine; he's gay anyway. So I met Ellie because I dated Fancy. Because I hung with Ellie, I met her then-boy friend, some pillow-lipped automaton whose name I forgot a couple minutes after we met. He's not important. It's because of him, though, I got to meet his best friend, Carter. Carter made out with me behind the bleachers after one of his soccer games, and that's how I knew.

I, uh, I wrote a melody for Ellie. I know it's cheating to use powers for it, but, well, I never really learned any. Instruments, that is. Hmph. Um. I'll play it for you now, if that's okay.

A pretty melody. Whatever instrument plays,  
Downy air-plays it. It's beautiful. A bit sad. He  
moves a bit like a dance.  
But it peters out. And then it's quiet.  
And lonely.  
And sad.

DOWNY

I forgot the rest. I'm sorry. Sometimes it feels like my mind is slipping. I can't remember how it goes. I could compose on the spot and pull some music from the nether...  
 What a waste of power. I make the noises in my head play out loud, and I took that pointless gift and chose to become a fucking orchestra.

This is on a delay, right? My apologies.

Ya know, Ellie was the only supe in her family. I cried a lot once we became friends. Whined in her arms about how worthless I felt, how I wasn't rising to my potential. Someone else should have been given what I had. But she'd smile that dorky, off-kilter smile, and she'd say, "You make music. Music saves people, too."

The sound of wind. Of cars.

Of a gasp.

DOWNY

I didn't push that suicidal bloke off the bridge. I played him the prettiest melody I'd ever thought up, and then he gasped when it faded out in pianissimo, and he jumped. Seth Colfax. He was 23. Dead, just like Ellie.

He eyes somewhere in the audience. Where reporters are. A camera.

DOWNY

You guys tried to say I killed him. A super villain born. I didn't. And I had to move. I had to pay some dudes with sketchy beards to root through my mail to make sure no one actually sent those bombs they kept calling me about. But I didn't save him, either. I'm no hero.

Ellie, though. Ellie was a hero. The ubermensch. She fought terrorists, brought temporary power to disaster areas. She stopped thefts and foiled murder plots. Every typical hero thing, Ellie did them. She excelled.

And now her melody is gone.

I wrote it, you know. I did. Something befitting someone... like her. Grandiose. I put it to paper. Sheet music I barely know how to read. But I didn't pack them in this suit. I can't use them to cheat my way back on track.

## DOWNY

All I hear is Seth's gasp and the creak of wood as Miss Buttlewick gripped her desk and blinked off tears. There's a piano too, buried, but it's got the melody all wrong. Can you hear it? Can you hear it?

It's there. A piano. I feel the taps behind my eyes. Pulses with every beat like a headache, gently, gently pounding. Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore." Can you hear it?

Music fades in. It crescendos.

## DOWNY

It's swelling. Here we go.

I'll play a number for you. Compose it on the spot.

You can listen to this curse in my head.

He air-plays.

The music sweeps and swells, beautiful and cinematic.

But chaos creeps in. Rushed. Harsh.

Almost atonal.

Downy's moves jerk. Contort. Almost as if he's possessed.

The music vanishes.

Downy freezes. Then:

## DOWNY

D'ya know she's not here? She dead, yeah, whatever, but her body. 'Snot here. Not in there. Empty present box for worms. Ellie isn't here. She's not fucking here.

He throws over the coffin.

## DOWNY

You think they'd let us have her? No. They took her corpse just like they do to all of us. Us so-called supers. They take us and cut us open and slice our cells and split our atoms in their bombs and don't you dare look so surprised. Knocking over caskets isn't proper etiquette. I know. Neither is what they've done to her.

## DOWNY

Keep rolling. You cut, well... Take it as a threat, if you want.

Ya know, you folks, you celebrate us. You're jealous.

Say shit like, "How lucky you are to have powers." Lucky. You call us lucky. That pointless word. You think is luck. Our corpses get desecrated, something you didn't care to know, but call it lucky.

Do you know what it's like in my head? In exchange for my "gift," the gasps. And the whispers. And the out of tune piano. The strings and the drum. The whole nine-fucking-yards. Breaking. Bursting. Always loud. Do you get that? Do you get how loud it is? Think that's lucky?

He finds someone in the crowd.

## DOWNY

Can you hear me? Can you hear me? Your lips aren't even moving. You, right there-- yeah, I'm fucking pointing at you--can you hear a single goddamn thing over this? I can't hear you! But you hear me, don't you? Do you?

Lucky.

And you call this luck.

I'm... blessed.

Ellie's dead. And they'll feed you something. They'll tell you she was heroic. She died serving her country. Serving the common good. But they'll say whatever it was is classified. Classified!

My thoughts play out loud.

Let the record show she slipped in the goddamn shower.

How's that for heroic? The best human on this shitty planet, *the* superhero, done in by a slippery bathroom. Then her government lies and steals her body, makes us bury an empty fucking coffin and pretend for the blessed masses.

What luck. What fortune we gifted have.

DOWNY

Can you hear her voice playing in my mind? She hasn't shut up since she died. She keeps saying that music saves people.

But here's my big secret. I don't hear music. All the time, my head is so quiet. It's quiet at fortissimo. Fortissississimo. Sextuple forte. There aren't any voices. There's no music, no sounds, nothing.

And the nothing is so fucking loud. It's so goddamn loud. It's loud. It's loud.

He mutters to himself as an overlapping voice plays from within his mind.

VOICE

Silence, Superman, and still. You are but silence and still. Silence and still. Silence and still. Silence and still and still and silence and still.

Downy sits on the rehearsal block. He pulls out a cigarette from somewhere on his person. Unlit, he takes a drag on it, morphing into the ACTOR. Another drag. Relaxing.

ACTOR

You ever pull one of these unlit? Feel the air flow through it. Ain't got that, uh, that cigarette taste, you know? That one that lingers in your mouth too long. I pull it out all the time. People glance over. Someone walks up, goes, "Hey, there's no smoking here." Used to throw back, "I'm not smoking it." But now I'll tuck it away, pull it out later. Not worth the fight.

In rehearsals, uh, people in the room, they'd say I should throw in a joke here. Thing is though, if I were funny, this'd be stand-up. Hit the circuits, you know. The Laugh Factories and the open mics and all those clubs. Pull out a tight five. That's what all my past boy friends called me. A tight five. May not be a Hollywood star, but I've got an ass that won't quit. 'S'that count as a joke?

So here's the thing about Downy.

You look at all these high rollers dashing through film after film booking that strapping hero who fucks with every new city and shoots baddies without a look.

ACTOR

I don't really understand them. Not on that "not understanding celebrity" thing people go on about, but taking those roles.

Like, yeah, heroes are where the money's at. It's how you build up that rabid fanbase that trends your name whenever you age and get closer to your milky expiration date. But, uh, the fun? That's with the villains. D'you catch that with Downy? That's his spiral. A spiral of silence. You know that's an actual term? Anyone got a guess what it is? No fuckin' clue, personally.

You think not lighting these means I'd only ever need one pack. But spit, ya know? Or it gets bent in a pocket or your heavy fuckin' fingers. After all this time, I should be pretty alright at making them last, but they don't last.

He takes a long drag. Flicks the cigarette.

ACTOR

Let's get on with it, yeah?